Quakerism 101
Unit F Getting Down to Business
February 14, 2010

Reading

Brinton Chapter 6

Michael L. Sheeran, *Beyond Majority Rule*, pp. 47 – 71, 91 - 106

Background on Readings

Michael L. Sheeran, a Jesuit Priest, researched Quaker decision making in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting for two years while doing doctoral study at Princeton University, *Beyond Majority Rule* resulted from his research.

Reflection

Please reflect on the following questions as you read and once you have read the reading.

How would you briefly explain Quaker business procedure to a non-Friend?

What is Quaker "unity"? What means ensure that minority views are not overridden by the majority? How can Friends make their dissent from a decision without blocking it?

Describe a decision made in Meeting for Business in which you believe Quaker process has worked well. What contributed to the positive outcome? Describe a situation in which a decision was reached in a less satisfactory manner. What was missing or what happened that hurt the decision making process?

What are some of the dangers in the Quaker way of reaching decisions?

How doe the "sense of the Meeting" differ from "consensus"? How can Friends avoid falling to the "lowest common denominator" in making a decision?

Briefly describe the role of the clerk in Meeting for Business. If you have served as clerk of a Meeting or Quaker committee, what advice would you give a new clerk?

ship. Periods of worship, especially at the beginning and end, lift hearts and minds out of self-centered desires into an openness to seek the common good under the leadership of the Spirit of Christ. All matters are considered thoughtfully, with due respect to every point of view presented. When a course of action receives the general, though not necessarily unanimous, approval of the group, the presiding clerk formulates the sense of the meeting and it is recorded in the minutes. No vote is taken; there is no decision made by a majority, who override opposition. Action is taken only when the group can proceed in substantial unity.[2]

A typical set of suggestions for good procedure comes from London Yearly Meeting's 1960 *Book of Discipline*:

> As it is our hope that in our Meetings for Discipline the will of God shall prevail rather than the desires of men, we do not set great store by rhetoric or clever argument. The mere gaining of debating points is found to be unhelpful and alien to the spirit of worship which should govern the rightly ordered Meeting. Instead of rising hastily to reply to another, it is better to give time for what has been said to make its own appeal, and to take its right place in the mind of the Meeting.
>
> We ought ever to be ready to give unhurried, weighty and truly sympathetic consideration to proposals brought forward from whatever part of the Meeting, believing that what is said rises from the depths of a Friend's experience, and is sincerely offered for the guidance of the Meeting, and the forwarding of the work of the Church. We should neither be hindered from making experiments by fear or undue caution, nor prompted by novel suggestions to ill-considered courses.
>
> Neither a majority nor a minority should allow itself in any way to overbear or to obstruct a meeting for church affairs in its course towards a decision. We are unlikely to reach either truth or wisdom if one section imposes its will on another. We deprecate division in our Meetings and desire unanimity. It is in the unity of common fellowship, we believe, that we shall most surely learn the will of God. We cherish, therefore, the tradition which excludes voting from our meetings, and trust that clerks and Friends generally will observe the spirit of it, not permitting themselves to be influenced in their judgment either by mere numbers or by persistence. The clerks should be content to wait upon God with the Meeting, as long as may be necessary for the emergence of a decision which clearly commends itself to the heart and mind of the Meeting as the right one.[3]

Individual writers concur with this picture of decision making. They expand upon the expectation that a final decision often is superior to the reflections of any individual in the group. James Walker, for example, tells us:

> The business meeting is an occasion to use insight, and not an occasion for debate. After the facts of a situation are given and there has been time for consideration, members should try to state their judgment concisely and clearly. As this is done, new insights may come, and hopefully the final outcome will represent a group judgment superior to that of any one individual. Partiality has no place; rather we seek a decision that is right in the light of God's wisdom. After an individual has stated his own insight, his responsibility is over. Whether the meeting accepts or rejects the idea as given, the responsibility is on the group. If the group has reacted unfavorably, it will then endeavor to find a more creative approach.[4]

Thomas S. Brown, former clerk of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, urges Friends to avoid "delivering remarks the meeting has heard many times before." One should ask oneself, "Is this repetition from frailty or from God?"

Brown urges that, instead of wasting the meeting's time with the polishing of the minutes which express the meeting's agreements, this editorial power should be entrusted to a committee, "for the Kingdom of God does not come minute by polished minute."

In a similar desire to keep the proceedings efficient, Brown urges careful preparation of the agenda by the clerk and respectful adherence to the agenda by participants in the meeting:

> For the right holding of Meetings it is important for Clerks to have the known business meticulously prepared in advance of the session. Matters carried over from previous sessions should be noted and the persons who have been asked to take some action or to make a report should be reminded of the service expected. Members who wish to bring concerns before the Meeting should be urged to inform the Clerk in advance, and to have all possible relevant material in hand and to make their remarks brief and recommendations clear. If any member feels moved to rise in the Meeting to raise a major new concern, he should ask himself whether this matter might not better wait to receive the preliminary sifting of other Friends.[5]

The sweep of advice on how to participate, then, runs from mystical suggestions that one let God's promptings determine whether it is time to speak, to some very practical admonitions on the careful preparation of an agenda.

Meeting for business always begins with silence and closes in silence—a clear reminder that an atmosphere of worshipfully seeking God's will is to mark the gathering. Douglas Steere puts it well: "The Quaker meeting for business opens with an unhurried period of waiting

silence, and if the meeting is properly carried through, there emerges something of this mood of openness not to my wishes and my designs and my surface preferences but openness to the deeper levels where the Guide's bidding may have its way and where the problem may be resolved in quite a different way than had ever occurred to me."[6]

Examples of the Process

Even in such an atmosphere, differences of opinion may make agreement very difficult. In that case, no change is made until agreement is reached. An example is provided by Elton Trueblood using the apparently trivial conflict which arose over the enlargement of a burial ground:

> [T]he old burial ground in the meeting house yard was filled. Strong sentiment was expressed, when the matter was first discussed, both for and against the enlargement. Those in favor of enlargement pointed out the fact that many families could not be given space for burial without increasing the size of the plot and that failure to give space was unfair discrimination between families. Those opposed to enlargement showed that the proposed action would limit the playground of the school, situated on the same grounds, and that it made the section less desirable for residences. It must be understood that this subject was one on which many felt deeply. Those whose loved ones were buried in the tiny space allotted could not consider anything in connection with it dispassionately and it is not surprising that they could not. Others were equally unable to consider dispassionately anything affecting the life of the school children. To them it was a matter of interests of the dead against the interests of the living.
>
> Since a decision seemed impossible on the first evening, the clerk made no minute and the problem was allowed to rest a month. It was not until six months later, however, that the question was settled and settled in a satisfactory manner. The strong emotional tone wore off, and several tempered their former statements, until at last it was decided to make a sufficient enlargement of the grounds to care for those now in membership and to make other arrangements for the future so that the question would not again arise. This small enlargement was made in such a way as to do no harm to the playground, and all seemed to approve of the clerk's estimate of the sense of the meeting. Best of all the members did not feel that a weak compromise had been made, but rather that the very best plan had been followed.[7]

Nor is use of the method limited to exclusively Quaker groups. Burton R. Clark's description of faculty meetings at Quaker-sponsored Swarthmore College reveals the successful use of the method by a largely non-Quaker faculty:

> The chairman would not commonly ask for a vote on an issue, and no one would rise from the floor to demand a count of hands or the use of a ballot. The expectation was that a common solution would arise through rational discussion, with each person first accepting for himself the rightness or appropriateness of a particular position. While the chairman and everyone else waited, there would be a search for the consensus; as the drift of opinion became clear, minority points of view often faded. The minority would see that the agreement necessary for policy and action lay in another direction, and if that direction seemed reasonable, they would go along with it. But a strong minority view that would not dissolve was taken seriously. Rather than vote it down, participants would continue the discussion or would table the issue so that further thought, discussion, and persuasion could take place outside the meeting room in the ensuing days and weeks. The matter might then be raised again at a subsequent meeting or, if a consensus was still missing, dropped.[8]

From the preceding citations, it is not difficult to detect a number of factors which seem characteristic of Quaker decision making. Stuart Chase[9] suggests nine such principles:

1. unanimous decisions—no voting;
2. silent periods—at start of meeting and when conflict arises;
3. moratorium—when agreement cannot be reached;
4. participation by all with ideas on the subject;
5. learning to listen—not going to meeting with mind made up;
6. absence of leaders—the clerk steers but does not dominate;
7. nobody outranks anybody;
8. factual-focus—emotions kept to a minimum; and
9. small meetings—typically limited numbers.

But which of these principles are fundamental and which derivative? Does Quaker unanimity entail the universal endorsement of decisions which it appears to? What goes on in the silences? Are all participants truly equal or only nominally so? Are emotions simply suppressed? To what extent does the method depend on the religious vision of Friends? Is a Quaker meeting for business really the leaderless body it appears?

In the chapters which follow we shall explore each of these questions in an attempt to bring the reader beyond the superficial comprehension which is the fruit of most of the descriptions one finds in print. Thus prepared, one should be able to attend Quaker business meetings with some sensitivity to the dynamics which are not otherwise obvious. Perhaps even some members of the Religious Society of Friends may find in these pages an occasional light on how his or her own meeting for business proceeds.

The sequence of topics deserves explanation. The writer has decided not to arrange all the important topics first (or last), with secondary matters placed in secondary positions. Instead, the focus is upon two central and subtle matters: the nature of unity in a decision and the systems of belief which seem to underlie successful use of the method. All other topics are introduced at points where they seem most apt for clarifying or being clarified by these central issues. For example, Chapter One discusses the atmosphere expected at a Quaker business meeting. This prepares the reader for an assessment of a primary issue, the nature of unity, which will be discussed in Chapter Two.

Chapter II

The Atmosphere of Confidence

Why Quakers Expect to Go Beyond Compromise

In the previous chapter, Elton Trueblood outlined the prolonged conflict within a monthly meeting over whether to expand the cemetery. He concluded his remarks with the observation that "best of all, the members did not feel that a weak compromise had been made, but rather that the very best plan had been followed."[1] A point of pride about Quaker decisions is that they occasion the emergence of such a higher synthesis of individual ideas. "The final result," comments S. B. Laughlin, "is not a compromise of conflicting views but a synthesis of the best thought of all—a case where two and two make five." Referring to Trueblood's decision about the cemetery, Stuart Chase explains, "The issue was not compromised but moved up to another level where a new plan was evolved—a plan in nobody's mind at the beginning of the discussion."[2]

An example may prove helpful. In 1967, a Quaker visiting a Philadelphia suburb made a public and fervent plea for a prompt end to the Vietnam War. In reaction, the local Quaker meeting house was defaced. At the meeting for business called to discuss the situation, many Friends thought that newspaper publicity should be sought; one felt strongly opposed. A number of prolonged silences followed. Finally, the Friend who had opposed the publicity suggested using the press to ask that area churches join a "paint-in" at the meeting house. This sort of publicity was readily endorsed by all.[3]

In his 1952 study of a Quaker meeting in Chicago, Glenn Bartoo states flatly, "In our experience compromise has never been resorted to."[4] Bartoo is, perhaps, a bit generous. This writer would rather say that compromise is the occasional exception to the rule.

Sometimes group pressure leads an individual to sacrifice what is best in favor of what is less embarrassing. As one Friend explained:

> The pressures on the dissenter are usually very strong; holding out takes great commitment. At our monthly meeting, the peace committee once wanted to put a picture in the paper of a previous vigil we had held against the Vietnam War. After three sessions, finally a compromise was accepted mainly because it was less offensive to those who were uneasy with opposition to the war. The compromise was just not as effective as the original proposal would have been.[5]

More generally, another Philadelphia Quaker commented, "There is the common tendency to turn to the lowest common denominator for a solution."

Friends sometimes, too, see a higher synthesis in outcomes where in fact neither side has been willing to budge. Burton Clark observes that the founders of Swarthmore were divided over whether it should be a college or a preparatory school. Instead of reaching a true higher synthesis, they agreed to open an institution that was both college and prep school, thus forcing the early educators to struggle over the question of priorities for a number of years.[6]

Granted the occasional failures, this observer was struck again and again by the efforts made in monthly meetings, at Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and Philadelphia Representative Meeting* to find solutions that would rise above the lowest denominator. This is as it should be. The goals of Quaker decision making are basically different from those of majority rule, a process to which most Americans are conditioned. The proposals made at the beginning of a discussion are thus usually seen by participants as starting points, not as finished products unsusceptible to modification.

At Representative Meeting, the spokesman for a committee making recommendations for remodeling an ancient building smiled at the end of his report and said: "Of course that's how *we* think it might be done. It might just be that Friends will have other ideas." For twenty minutes the meeting then discussed the pros and cons of the committee's suggestions with the committee's spokesman cheerfully revising the proposal

* Composed of individuals appointed by each monthly meeting to make decisions for the yearly meeting in months when the yearly meeting is not in session.

when the group moved towards options his committee had not presented.[7]

Our point here is that the attitude with which Friends approach a decision is different from that which prevails in the context of majority rule. In Quaker decision making, it generally is presumed that each participant seeks the best solution; it is also generally presumed that the group, by searching together, can reach such a correct solution. We shall see later how behavior which evidences attitudes contrary to this searching together suffers subtle but sharp sanctions. As a result, the common search for the best solution which is dismissed as pious rhetoric in the context of majority rule becomes an effective norm in the voteless Quaker world.

The attitude demanded of Friends is one of openness to one another's ideas—the ability to put aside pet notions in favor of the next person's insight. Francis, Beatrice, and Robert Pollard, writing in *Democracy and Quaker Method*, comment:

> It is true that such methods make great demands on those who practise them, and we must acknowledge that Friends sometimes take refuge from these demands in solutions which are little more than a mere shelving of them. The temptation to do this is the inevitable defect of the method's qualities. In experimenting with Quaker methods it would be necessary to understand this. The remedy is a deeper appreciation of the method. Those who dread the effects of candour in a Meeting are not giving that Meeting the opportunity which it needs to realise all the possibilities of its group life. Such a feeling is often an inverted fear of something within oneself, and the Meeting which is fully trusted by its members can do much to release them from that fear.[8]

Why There Are Few Shy Quakers

Release from fear, from shyness, from reluctance to express one's ideas is thus given high priority by Friends. In a sense, the conclusion reached by the assembly is a musical composition, and each participant has one note to contribute; if very many notes are missing, the theme loses its beauty and perhaps even becomes unrecognizable. In a very brief pamphlet on procedures at Quaker meetings, Thomas S. Brown still takes time to remark that "it is also of great importance that those Friends who feel they cannot speak acceptably and who are diffident about the significance of their share in the Meeting be encouraged to say what they can, remembering that the concerns they feel they present so haltingly may in fact point to issues needing the Meeting's consideration."[9]

James Walker urges the more vocal Friends to temper their remarks in order to encourage reluctant speakers: "Vocal members who tend to

make up their minds quickly should make a special effort at self-restraint. Too frequently the leaders of the meeting seem to be making the decision without carrying with them the rank and file, who find it difficult to offer vocal opposition. Sometimes the quiet ones accept an unpalatable action because they have been unwilling to speak up. Under such circumstances they must accept at least part of the blame."[10]

One interview subject summed up his feelings this way: "With Friends, I know from experience that, even if I should say something foolish, nobody would make me feel embarrassed or think the less of me."

One of the quiet but constant reminders that this atmosphere will prevail is the Quaker style of discussion. We have seen a statement of London Yearly Meeting which counsels: "We do not set great store by rhetoric or clever argument. The mere gaining of debating points is found to be unhelpful and alien."[11]

Howard Brinton explains: "Eloquence which appeals to emotion is out of place. Those who come to the meeting not so much to discover Truth as to win acceptance of their opinions may find that their views carry little weight. Opinions should always be expressed humbly and tentatively in the realization that no one person sees the whole truth and that the whole meeting can see more of Truth than can any part of it."[12]

Public American rhetorical style in our own era is superficially similar to Quaker public speech—informal, devoid of oratorical flourishes, chary of blatant appeals to emotion—but one need only sit a short time in a Quaker meeting for business to recognize a deeper quality. Tentativeness and an artless willingness to face the weaknesses in one's position rather than to paper them over with distracting allusions are outstanding differences.

Sanctions against unacceptable rhetoric are subtle but effective. On the rare occasions when such speech happens, no comment is normally made; instead the discussion continues, the following speakers pointedly ignoring the offender's remarks. In the coffee break which next occurs, one is likely to overhear such wisps of conversation as, "John should know better than to speak like that," or, "If there's one thing that winds me down, it's the way Susan tries to get us all wound up." This is one form of the social sanctioning wryly described by Quakers as the "Philadelphia Treatment."

The Philadelphia Treatment also works in reverse. A Friend whose halting delivery or poor choice of words suggests that he or she is shy before groups will often find his or her theme picked up by one of the

meeting's more respected and experienced members. In the coffee break or after the meeting, various Friends will stop the shy Friend to thank him or her for the insight. The shy Friend's contribution has thus been endorsed in public and in private. At the next meeting, the Friend is likely to be more confident.

Having made the above point, we feel duty bound to temper it a bit. The extent of shyness varies from one monthly meeting to the next. In one monthly meeting, the "old guard" may not be receptive to newcomers. In another, the "social activists" may be less than enthusiastic about the contributions of members who are "inadequately sensitive" to social issues. A dominant personality in yet a third meeting may keep would-be contributors from speaking their minds. Granted such failures, it is clear that Friends typically emphasize the importance of encouraging every participant in a meeting to feel that his or her contribution will be received with appreciation.

On Keeping Emotion in Its Place

Friends do have a problem when it comes to the expression of emotions. "Quakers hold back their emotions more than most people," volunteered one interview subject—an observation in which this observer would heartily concur. Because appeals to emotion are so out of place, Friends sometimes find it inappropriate to reveal their own inner feelings or to seek out ways of speaking which will let people know—in a non-rhetorical manner—the depth of their feelings. As a result, the emotional dimensions of topics sometimes do not get the frank attention they deserve because emotions are considered unworthy.

For example, a member of the Board of Directors of the American Friends Service Committee threw unexpected light on just this point. When asked whether a decision by the Service Committee to violate federal law and risk loss of tax exemption by shipping penicillin to the North Vietnamese was a good example of Quaker decision making, the following reply was made: "The penicillin decision was a good example of Quaker decision making. . . . But it's interesting that the decisions over which we have the most trouble are more 'average' issues: property, budgets, graveyards. On these matters, feelings are high. . . ."

In practice, Friends seem to have a scale for judging just how much personal feelings may be revealed. If an individual is generally quite cerebral and self-controlled, an occasional manifestation of personal feelings is accepted sympathetically. For example, a woman whose style of

speech—in and out of meeting for business—was thoughtful and pleasantly off-handed, stood to complain that Quaker peace-promotion teams were being excluded from area high schools although army recruiters were welcomed with fanfare. She mentioned the pressures this put on young boys, her son among them. Her voice revealed deep grief and, on the verge of tears, she sat. A respectful silence was finally broken by speakers voicing agreement and offering practical steps the meeting might take.[13]

In this case, emotion seemed acceptable because it was rare. Clearly it was not the speaker's custom to speak this way—and because the emotions were not a substitute for reasonableness—even without her expression of feelings, the woman's concern was clearly in keeping with the Quaker commitment to peace education.

Three other members of the same meeting also spoke emotionally from time to time. In these cases, the contributions were received with limited sympathy. The remarks of the speakers who immediately followed the emotional contributions, the observations of Friends interviewed just after the meeting, and the examples cited during formal interviews when this problem was raised all indicated that sympathy was, at best, minimal. One person complained that such an individual got carried away all the time but just didn't "carry me along." The complaints seemed to focus on frequency and a tendency to let emotion obscure the issues.

It should also be noted that Friends seem to accept readily the simple statement that "this moves me deeply" as adding a factor of weight to an individual's remarks. This suggests once again that Friends are not opposed to emotions, not opposed to their having an important bearing on decisions. What seems important to Friends is that emotions be both deep and frankly recognized as emotions. Infrequency is a very handy measure of depth—hence the aversion to one who speaks this way all the time. But recognition is also important: I must know what my emotions are if I am to cope with them. So, too, must a group be aware of the feelings of its members. Hence, Friends are open to statements such as "I find this decision by the city makes me very angry," and to displays of emotion in which the feelings are revealed but kept under control of reason. In both situations, the emotions are recognized and can be dealt with thoughtfully. Although many Friends do seem to stifle their feelings, then, the mores of the meeting urge them to channel these emotions rather than to suppress them.

For those Friends who are aficionados of the "let it all hang out" school of human interaction—an approach somewhat popular among young

adults in the community—the normal Quaker structure of channeled emotion seems stilted and even dishonest at times. However, all the Friends interviewed on this topic indicated a general sense of confidence in the meeting's willingness to sympathize with their own deep concerns.

This openness to deeply felt emotions is one more indicator of the warm subculture that seems to mark Quaker meetings. In order to foster that warmth, Howard Brinton suggests that a conscious effort be made at developing a real affection within the group, using any devices that will help it "become as much of a genuine unit, economically, socially, and in every other way, as its members desire." Quakers strive for increased "social solidarity." They lament the loss of such stimuli to fellowship as the old holiday week of yearly meeting which was held just before the plowing season so farm families could lodge in the homes of their Philadelphia brethren for seven full days, the latter closing their small shops for the duration.[14]

When Confidence Fails

The atmosphere of respectful openness to one another is an essential element which is taken for granted by all the Quaker sources this writer has consulted. An example or two of what Quaker decisions are like without this atmosphere may be instructive.

Pendle Hill is a residential study center for adults—Friends and non-Friends—interested in thoughtful pursuit of social and religious questions traditionally explored by Quakers. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, even this institution was struck by the unrest common on campuses whose clientele were much younger. A member of the Pendle Hill Board of Directors describes the situation:

> For about five terribly difficult years, students—who are present from ten to twelve weeks—and staff—one year usually—demanded the right to participate in Board and Executive Committee decisions. The two bodies resented accepting them because the motivation was so clearly lack of trust, suspicion, desire of power. One man urged that there was no incongruity in disbanding Pendle Hill if some group there for twelve weeks should so conclude. They were finally allowed to be present in limited numbers—two staff, two students—and often revealed an inquisitorial belligerence. I recall one fellow's challenge of the treasurer. The treasurer finally was able to show him what the entries in the accounts stood for and he backed down, letting the atmosphere change.

And splits do exist within the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. We shall discuss these in some detail later. For the moment, a single example may

suffice. Especially troublesome is the case of inactive Friends from old Quaker families who are drawn to meeting for business on the occasion of some controversial issue—for example, contributing funds to a Black group which is demanding reparations, or removing the wall surrounding the cemetery where six generations of their ancestors are buried.

In such a situation this interviewer has had instances described where inactive Friends, rusty in Quaker methods, tend to become judgmental about the "insensitive" proposals of some of the meeting's active members. The latter are described (in private) as novices unused to Quaker ways. The active members, on their side, see a lack of commitment, a selfish prejudice in their normally inactive brethren. In such a situation, the externals of Quaker decision making may be observed, but our conversations with participants support our impression at such sessions that the dynamic of seeking a higher unity through receptiveness to that of God in the other was only minimally at work.

At times when such conflicts are especially vivid, some Friends find that the Quaker method is better used at the American Friends Service Committee—where the majority of employees who participate in decisions are usually non-Quakers—than at gatherings where all participants are Quakers but where genuine receptiveness to others is not achieved:

> I'd much rather work through a problem at the Service Committee than in a monthly meeting. I worry about the "sense of the meeting" approach in the Society of Friends. So often, the people making decisions don't have a lot in common—outlook, the endeavors in which they spend most of their time, etc. My monthly meeting suffered a shattering experience over the Black separatist groups. Lots of people came out of the woodwork who hadn't ever worshipped there. At AFSC, there are many viewpoints, but at least there is a context of effort to bring about improvement in the status of the neighbor and real interaction among the decision makers. You know this guy well enough to give serious hearing to his "far out" idea. Because of personal experience, we take one another seriously. My own ideas *have* changed on social issues because I've been nudged by colleagues with whom I interact so much.

The need for openness has some direct corollaries. Friends agree that their method is hamstrung whenever participants cannot be face-to-face: "On not really important issues, I admit that the phone or even correspondence may have to be used. But basically you need to look people in the eye to be sensitive to them."

Another corollary is that the topics with which a group can successfully deal are normally limited by the strength of the bonds of respect for

one another which prevail within the community. We shall see more of this when we explore the role of the clerk in judging what items are ripe for the agenda.

But the purpose of this chapter is not so much to spell out details of Quaker procedure as to make clear to the reader the atmosphere that prevails in those situations where the Quaker method seems to work well. The emphasis is on acceptance of one another, mutual respect, avoidance of the manipulative conduct which rhetorical style often hides, a sense of the partiality of one's own insights, and one's dependence on searching together with the group for better conclusions than anyone alone could have attained.

With some notion of the general atmosphere as prelude, we are now in a position to explore one of our main topics, the nature of the unity involved in a decision.

Chapter III

No Decisions Without Unity

One major difficulty in assessing Quaker procedure is that no conventional term adequately expresses the phenomenon of decisional agreement in a Quaker meeting. Some people describe all decisions as unanimous on the grounds that any objecting member could prevent action. But this is a misnomer because it implies that all participants are satisfied when a decision is reached—a point hardly true of many Quaker decisions. Other people speak of consensus, thereby underscoring that the bulk of those present agree even if one or two objectors remain. But this, too, is misleading. Quakers are simply not satisfied to know that even the overwhelming majority are in agreement.[1]

Given this verbal difficulty, many Friends adhere carefully to the term "unity" rather than "unanimity" or "consensus." This term, too, can be misleading if one makes it a synonym for unanimity. Unity, however, has the advantage of being widely used among Friends and has historical roots in the understanding that the one Spirit of Truth leads all to unite in what the Spirit reveals.[2] Hence, the common expression, "I can unite with what Friend Smith has said."

Another early Quaker term was "concord." Edward Burrough exhorted his brethren in 1662 "to determine of things by a general mutual concord, in assenting together as one man in the spirit of truth and equity, and by the authority thereof."[3] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines concordance in this same sense of harmonizing various accounts.[4]

The melodic image is useful. It suggests that the sort of agreement

found in Quaker decisions is not an identity of view such that every participant ends up on the same note. Instead, they remain on different notes but blend them as the pianist blends conplementary notes into a chord.

Although this writer's preferred term would be concord, modern Quaker usage demands unity, a term of clear meaning to the Friend but open to misunderstanding by the outsider. However, the writer bows to current Friendly custom and speaks of Quaker unity in the discussion which follows.

Preliminary Discussion

In many Quaker decisions there are at least two stages of discussion. The preliminary stage follows initial presentation of both the problem and its possible solutions. At this point, participants often ask questions of the person who has made the presentation, offer tentative alternatives to the proposal, and even find themselves more in the posture of brainstorming than of making serious judgments. Remarks contrary to the proposal at such a time are taken to be exploratory. If the speaker decides to offer them seriously, he or she will have to raise them when the discussion gets to the more serious phase which precedes the declaration of unity by the clerk.

Transition from the preliminary to the serious phase is normally informal. An individual will begin to speak in a less tentative tone and others will follow this invitation and speak from their considered judgments rather than in an exploratory fashion.

At the time of transition, trial balloons are sometimes floated. An individual will offer a suggestion—perhaps a rejection of the basic proposal for a novel reason—and then sit back to see what response the idea draws from the group. Such a statement does not involve personal commitment to the idea one enunciates, although the neophyte observer could easily mistake the remark for a seriously-held objection. This observer did just that on a few occasions, only to discover in conversations after the session that the participants had generally read the remark as a testing of the waters.

The ability to differentiate tentative from serious remarks is important for all participants in the discussion, but especially for the clerk, whose duty it is to read the group and decide whether there is serious objection to the general direction in which discussion is moving.

Serious Discussion

As Friends begin to speak their serious conclusions, the tide will build.

Speakers will piggyback on the ideas of their predecessors. Listeners wl find a speaker's remarks match their own feelings will follow his or h words with a chorus of "I agree" or "I can unite with that" or "that spea my mind."

But sometimes several currents are running in the tide, pulling tl meeting in two or more directions. Or there may be no tide or curre at all: even after discussion, the participants may find that no option dra them into unison. In either of these situations, discussion continues u til a dominant position emerges or until, at the suggestion of the cle or some other participant, there is agreement that no conclusion can l reached for now. In this case, the matter is postponed: "It is the clerl task within the plexus of this corporate exercise either to find a resolutic with which the assembled Friends can largely agree or to follow the Quak rule, 'when in doubt, wait'. In the latter case the minute might rea 'Friends could not reach clarity on a resolution of the issue in this meeti and it was agreed to postpone that matter until the following month meeting'."[5]

If, however, the tide is running in a particular direction, the clerk expected to make a judgment that the group is now ready for agreeme and to propose a tentative minute embodying the agreement as the cle understands it from listening to the discussion.

Dissent from a Proposed Minute

When the clerk proposes a minute, each member of the assembla has two quite different questions to ask. First, does the proposed minu catch the drift of discussion? If the answer is no, someone can be expec ed to object. One occasionally hears such a paradoxical remark as: "If please the clerk! Although the minute pleases me, I suspect it says a b more than Friends are willing to say." More typically, the objection will b phrased; "Well I, for one, would be uncomfortable with such a minut And, from what I've heard, many others in the room would be uncon fortable, too."

Discussion follows such an objection, with various Friends stating ho they respond to the minute as an expression of the group's will. The cle rephrases or withdraws the minute if need be.

If the clerk is adept at chairing the meeting—more on this in a lat chapter—such misreading of the group's leanings is relatively rare. Unde an experienced clerk, therefore, each participant is much more likely t move to a second question. Although the minute reflects the trend of th

group, is each member comfortable with that trend? If the answer is no, one may choose to rise in order to speak against the minute. Perhaps the group has not considered adequately a point which has hidden import. After one speaks, others will agree or disagree and, once any new discussion has run its course, the clerk will either again propose the original minute or offer a substitute depending on whether the discussion revealed a shift in preferences. It is often the case that one person's statement of misgivings leads others to reassess their judgments, giving more prominence to matters they had initially dismissed.

But suppose the group remains unmoved by one person's uneasiness. Given the folklore of Quaker dissent, the answer is simple: if the person can't agree, the group is unable to proceed. The realities, fortunately, are much more subtly adapted to the complexities of human disagreement. For example, opposition to an advertisement in the *New York Times* calling for the impeachment of the President is quite a different category from opposition to starting a cleanup project at 9 A.M. instead of 9:30 A.M. on Saturday. In Quaker decision making, a whole spectrum of dissent is available. The paragraphs which follow indicate some typical points on the spectrum.

"I Disagree but Do Not Wish to Stand in the Way"

In many instances the point of disagreement, for one reason or another, is not strong enough to merit standing in the way of the decision. For religious reasons, a person may prefer the judgment of the group as "sincere seekers after the divine leading" to that person's individual judgment. In more secular terms, an individual may recognize the possibility that everyone else is right, or that an important principle is or is not involved.[6]

This is the level at which, in practice, most dissent is expressed. The meeting is left aware of the dissenter's opinion, yet the dissenter has indicated a wish not to keep the matter from moving forward.[7] Equivalently, the objector has thus endorsed the action of the group by implying that *in his or her own judgment* the objection is not serious enough to prevent action.[8]

The dissenter has thus put him or herself in a psychologically peculiar but liberating situation. The individual can leave the meeting with a sense of integrity ("I never approved the proposal. There was no compromise of my own belief, my own leaning.") because he or she did not, after all, pretend to endorse the group's choice. But at the same time, the individual also feels some sense of responsibility because, "I could have stopped or

at least delayed the action, but I didn't." Therefore, the individual ten to take some responsibility for the decision, even to feel some obligatic for making it work out well in practice. We shall explore this matter more depth later on.

In Quaker decisions, this moment of withdrawing one's opposition- though not one's disagreement—so the meeting may proceed is a ve important way of preventing polarization; and its exercise, therefore, virtually an art form of graciousness. Paradoxically, some Friends make point of being especially strong in their criticism of a proposal becau they know that, if the proposal is accepted by the group, they will ha this moment to withdraw their opposition and therefore to prevent the harsh statements from working permanent division into the communit Here is an example which indicates the importance of the withdrawa

At the 1975 session of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, a major bone contention was the size of the budget for the Yearly Meeting staff in th year ahead. A small but vocal group from a monthly meeting claimed be dissatisfied with the emphasis of the Yearly Meeting staff on social wo in the Philadelphia metropolitan area—work of little service to meetin like their own outside the metropolitan area. The treasurer of the grou complained that the budget for the Yearly Meeting had been enlarged eve year for the last ten years and that it would be necessary to fire the montl ly meeting's one full-time employee to meet their proportional share the proposed Yearly Meeting budget. Prolonged discussion revealed th the bulk of the speakers did not concur with the monthly meeting's desi to cut the Yearly Meeting's budget.

The evening was wearing on. The clerk reminded all of the shortne of time. Then he picked up an earlier suggestion that it might be possibl for financially strong monthly meetings to absorb a larger proportion the increased budget than financially weak meetings. He remarked th it was clear the budget had been approved but also that the Yearly Meetin had a responsibility to be concerned about the unhappiness of displea ed meetings and that therefore a meeting ought be held later on to decid whether costs could be partly absorbed by meetings which felt they wer financially stronger.

From the floor came the cry, "I fail to see how the Yearly Meeting ha approved the budget when a number of us do not approve the budget

The clerk replied that, in the judgment of the clerk, the only majc point of contention was that of distributing the financial burden. Sinc this would now be put off until a later meeting for settlement, the matte

of the budget was in fact settled; the matter of its mode of appropriation would be settled at a subsequent meeting.

For the moment, the clerk's reply silenced, although it did not satisfy, the objector. The objecting Friends had been as much upset about the way Yearly Meeting expenditures were focused on social projects in Philadelphia as over the added financial burden, and the clerk's declaration seemed to ignore this concern.[9]

Conversations with those present cast light on Quaker custom. One man of many years' experience indicated that the clerk had clearly been right in saying that the general feeling was in favor of the budget, but that the clerk seemed to have stretched his role as far as you can take it in moving things too rapidly to a conclusion before the dissatisfied members had withdrawn their objection. A number concurred in the observation that the size of the assembly—several hundred people—and the lateness of the hour had led the clerk to move too fast. A few—one on the floor of the meeting the next day—complained that the clerk was misapplying Quaker procedures.

In interviews some weeks later, however, individuals who had initially objected to the budget felt "very content with the outcome." They didn't really want to block the budget; they wanted to serve notice of its questionable dimensions for the monthly meetings. The monthly meeting the objection came from was "rather suspect among Friends anyway" and thus drew little real sympathy for its objections. One observer commented:

> The clerk read the mood of the house perfectly well. If he made any mistake at all, it was in letting the press of time short circuit the normal procedure. He might better have declared that "Friends seem to be at an impasse" and asked for a few moments of silence. Or he could have indicated he was unable to make a minute and asked whether the Meeting wished to drop the next day's agenda until this matter might be resolved. In either case, the objecting Friends, having made their point, would have indicated a desire not to stand in the way. But he moved too quickly and took away their chance to withdraw their objections.

The clerk's speed thus seemed to lead to a sense of polarization in the group by depriving the dissidents of their moment of reconciliation. Given the number of Friends with strong opinions on the subject even months after this event, it would seem that the ramifications were not ephemeral.[10] Withdrawal of objections is far more than a ritual; it truly liberates the meeting to go forward and prevents the polarization that normally arises at the moment of voting when one side becomes victor, the

other vanquished. In the Quaker system, such a moment does not nc mally arise because those who have been unable to sway the group ha the opportunity to join it. In joining the group, they truly do free it to a

"Please Minute Me as Opposed"

One step further along the spectrum of dissent is a practice much le common among Friends—and therefore much more significant—the r quest that one can be "minuted as opposed." In this case, the object wishes that the minute expressing the sense of the meeting should nc his or her disagreement. Although fairly common in the past, the pr cedure is unfamiliar to many Quakers today. Its use leaves the meeti free to proceed but also tends to make the group more reluctant than the objector had stopped short of asking to be listed in the minute as o posed. An example from the Board of Directors of Pendle Hill, the Quak adult education facility outside Philadelphia, may be helpful:

> We had a problem at Pendle Hill over whether to permit cohabitation of unmarried students and/or faculty. In both cases, remember, we are talking of people older than college age. After lengthy consideration, the Board settled on a policy in which we did not approve such cohabitation but did give the administration discretion in exceptional cases to allow it.
>
> One Board member wanted his name recorded in dissent in the minute. It was necessary for the clerk to explain to some Friends that such was an appropriate procedure. Four more Friends then asked that their names be added to his. This was a sizable number; yet none desired to prevent the movement forward.

The decision drew wide notice among Philadelphia area Friends. Tl notations of dissent made the action seem experimental, tentative, hes tant. Curiously, the action did not stir the amount of criticism amon Quakers one might have expected, perhaps precisely because its painfi uncertainty was so clearly underscored.[11]

Depending upon the circumstances, the request that one be "minute as not united" with the decision can make a group much more hesitar to go forward than the mere withdrawal of objection. In both case: however, the objector explicitly indicates that the objection should *not* stan in the way.

"I Am Unable to Unite with the Proposal"

Next on the spectrum is a situation in which a person is simply "unable to unite" with a proposal in such a basic way that he or she is unwilling to stand aside and let the meeting move forward. In such a situation, the normal procedure is to delay action until a later time. If time is short or

the objection seems frivolous, the clerk or another Friend may appeal to the objector to withdraw the objection or to consent to be minuted as opposed.[12]

If there is a delay, all take time to reflect again on their positions. Discussions may also occur among those who participated in the recent meeting. The clerk and those highly respected by the objector may make strong efforts to understand the roots of the objection. This is one form of what Quakers call "laboring with Friend X."

At the meeting which follows, very often agreement is possible. The objector's problem has been traced to something nonessential in the proposal and the proposal has been adjusted accordingly. Or the objector has come to see that his or her unhappiness is not so profound as originally thought and is now willing to stand aside. Often, too, the objector is now able to stand aside because he or she is confident that trusted members of the meeting have understood his or her point of view and, having thought it through conscientiously, still do not agree. The individual's respect for their judgments makes it easier to let the decision go forward. The person can, of course, still choose not to unite with the decision, although the social pressure to unite grows with each delay and each discussion with a respected Friend. If the individual does not unite, the group may continue to delay or, thinking the objections frivolous, proceed anyway. Delay is the much more likely course. Many an interview subject has summed up the likely outcome of a conflict within his or her meeting with the remark, "We won't solve this one until we have a good Quaker funeral or two."

Absence

Our spectrum is complicated by the Friend who does not attend a meeting at all. The cause is normally no more than disinterest or the press of other responsibilites. But a Friend who is regularly a member of the group but absents him or herself at a time of critical decision becomes conspicuous. A Friend absented herself from a Quaker school's board meeting where she knew it would be decided to invite parents of non-Quaker students to join the Board. "If I had gone," she confided to another board member, "I would have just had to object. So I didn't go." Her absence was felt by all. But the Board went ahead with its decision. Deliberate absence can, then, have multiple meanings. Even when it signifies deep disagreement with a proposal, it does not necessarily block action.

Intangible Factors Affecting the Impact of Dissent

It might be helpful here to return to the spectrum of possible modes of dissent and indicate likely outcomes. Basically, the group can be expected to go ahead at once if the objector follows the typical approach of stating his or her unease but affirming a desire not to stand in the way. The same is true even if he or she asks to be minuted as opposed, although it seems that the group will proceed in much more chary fashion. (This is based on sparse evidence; current cases are extremely rare.) If the individual feels simply unable to unite, the group will normally delay action.

But for how many meetings will the group delay action on one subject? To answer this question, we must introduce a new and complicated set of factors. In practice, the group's willingness to delay is a function of the apparent importance of the objector's objection—how deeply a matter of principle is it? The group's readiness to delay also depends on its respect for the objector. What is the individual's reputation for wisdom or spiritual sensitivity or expertise in the area under consideration? Yet a third factor is time. The more urgent the matter, the more highly regarded the objector needs to be.[13] And, of course, how many objectors are there? Fifteen out of 100, even if they do not carry much weight as individuals, form a significant group.

In a sense, these factors are a social scientist's nightmare. The relative significance of each factor depends in each situation upon the entire set of relationships existing at a given moment within the group under consideration. Any single factor—size of the minority, reputation of the objector(s), pressure of time, importance of the issue to the objector(s), importance of the issue to the most respected spokesmen for the dominant side—can be significant enough to control the outcome in one situation, but unimportant in the next.

Chapter V

Quaker Leadership

Now that our essay has established that individuals and even group are quite capable of group-centered action and has sketched the myth that support such a liberated action, it seems appropriate to explore th high expectations Quakers have for their leaders. We shall focus upon th one major official of Friends business meetings, the clerk.

The Clerk's Responsibilities: Devices for Hidden Control

Douglas Steere defines the clerk as a person whose personal belie in Quaker presuppositions expresses itself in some special qualities:

> He or she is a good listener, has a clear mind that can handle issues, has the gift of preparing a written minute that can succinctly sum up the sense of the meeting, and is one who has faith in the presuppositions that were mentioned earlier: faith in the presence of a Guide; faith in the deep revelatory genius of such a meeting to arrive at a decision that may break new ground and yet may in fresh ways be in keeping with the Society of Friends' deepest testimonies; and faith in each of those present being potentially the vehicle of the fresh resolving insight. With all of this, a good clerk is a person who refuses to be hurried and can weary out dissension with a patience borne of the confidence that there is a way through, although the group may have to return again and again to the issue before clearness comes and a proper decision is reached.[1]

Let us look at some of the clerk's ordinary duties and discover how they may also become levers of power.

Agenda

On the face of it, the clerk's responsibilities are extensive. The clerk prepares the agenda in advance. Although as one clerk put it, "they [clerks] consult others if they have sensed the final agenda is generally left to their judgment. The clerks sense of the group may suggest ordering items so that the assembly will not be tired out before considering an issue of import, with less controversial matters saved until the end so that they can be dealt with quickly and efficiently. Or, the clerk may order agenda items so that an important topic upon which the group is likely to reach easy agreement comes early in the meeting and establishes a sense of confidence for dealing with a more difficult matter later in the session.

Stating the Questions and General Neutrality

Clerks will often be charged with summarizing a problem or framing a question as prelude to discussion. They are trusted to outline the facts and sketch two or three courses of action. They are expected to "be chary . . . of making known their own views" either initially or as discussion progresses.[3] Says one Friend, because the clerk's role is to "point the mirror [of the meeting] towards the Truth, he cannot try to be the source of the light."[4] This rule of neutrality is sometimes waived in very small, intimate monthly meetings, but not in major matters.

Evoking Comments from the Silent

The clerk must be especially alert to silent Friends. One clerk comments: "The clerk definitely should draw out those ill at ease. Even if you suspect some are opposed because of their silence, you should make them know their opinion is needed by the group." Another clerk tried to "draw out the shy people" by calling on every speaker by name.

Particularly in cases of hidden opposition, the clerk's action is important to the sense of obligation which the decision is likely to bring: "The clerk's big job is to look for the people who might remain silent now but will erupt after the decision is taken and the session has ended." The Friend whose silence allows him or her to withdraw feels less obligation to support the decision than the Friend who spoke against the proposal but finally chose to step aside. Because this individual participated and chose not to stand in the way, the vocal Quaker speaks of being obliged to go along. The individual who chose not to speak at the meeting may later talk after the event as if he or she had not been present, had no voice, and therefore has no part in what "they" did.

The positive side of this same phenomenon is the clerk's ability to build support for major decisions by polling the participants. An example of this would be the manner in which a new executive director was selected at Pendle Hill. After favorable discussion, the board chairman announced that the sense of the meeting favored the hiring of a particular individual. No one demurred. Then the clerk took the unusual step of going round the room and asking each of the sixty board members if they approved the action. Each responded affirmatively. The drama of the individual assents heightened the awareness that each board member supported the decision. Board members the writer spoke with later indicated a special sense of obligation to aid the new executive director.

Discipline

It is usually the clerk's responsibility to maintain discipline among the speakers. The long-winded speaker may find the clerk intervening to remark, "I think we've heard thy message." In recent years, the clerk of Philadelphia's Representative Meeting took a leaf from London Yearly Meeting's custom book. If a Friend was speaking too long, the clerk stood to signal that it was time to stop. In London, at least, this movement is so much a part of Friends practice that the offender who continues after the clerk rises is likely to hear, "the clerk is standing." Such a remark is ignored at one's peril.

At times the clerk's personal reputation is so highly regarded that such disciplinary powers give great control over the proceedings. One participant in decisions at a Quaker college recalled, "If X was in the clerk's chair and looked unhappy or suggested that the point had already been made, the offender felt chastened." Such dominance is, in the writer's experience, rare.

Diplomacy and "Acting for the Uncomfortable Meeting"

The clerk's skills as a diplomat are also relied upon on occasion. "Chronic objectors must be dealt with considerately, even though their opinions may carry little weight."[5] The writer came across one decision in which a generally respected Friend seemed to object to every proposal on a particular topic. The committee was generally stymied. After a few weeks, the regular clerk returned from a trip and replaced his temporary substitute. In the next meetings, the objector's unhappiness was considered, but without the concern previously accorded it. The group moved forward quickly. Although the point was never discussed in the meetings of the committee, the members were aware that that objector's disagreement stemmed from a pet proposal the committee had decided against.

Said one participant, "The assistant clerk was just not up to coping with X." Clearly, Friends expect much of their clerks. A clerk remarked: "When faced with the chronic objector, the clerk must be gracious but firm. In a way, the clerk is always in a bind between reverencing the objector's opinion and acting for the uncomfortable meeting."

Clerks differ over the extent to which they believe they should utilize this power with which they are both entrusted and burdened. One respected clerk suggested that, as a last resort, clerks should do what they can to let the objector feel the weight of the meeting against the individual to make him or her feel isolated. Others disagreed strongly: "The objector is a child of God. Maybe in secular meetings you can operate this way. It just doesn't fit Friends' basic view of man." What impressed this observer was how consistently the latter view prevailed.

Judging What Is Important

Some clerks fear squelching any dissenter: "X sees the clerk as a servant who listens and records. He lets us go on and on. We can never finish anything on time." Other clerks are much more aggressive. One, commenting on Yearly Meeting sessions remarked: "I feel that if we delay a decision because we haven't complete clarity, if we let it run over into next year's meeting, we lose momentum, start next time from scratch and end up quitting again just where we left off the previous year."

We have already observed how this pressure to conclude discussion can bring unfortunate results when the sense of the meeting is announced before objectors have felt ready to withdraw their opposition. This is usually more a problem of finding a way to invite withdrawal than of anything more serious. However rare, real abuse of power can occur as well. The schism of 1827 was partly occasioned by a clerk of Yearly Meeting who called on Philadelphia Quaker businessmen far more frequently than Friends from farm country because he felt the businessmen had more significant things to say. Or more recently, a few years ago the clerk of one monthly meeting apparently just did not like a highly respected Friend. The clerk used his authority to weaken that Friend's positions by not calling on him, passing by his suggestions, etc. If the observer is struck by how rarely this sort of thing occurs, he also quickly realizes that the amount of judgment allowed the clerk makes such abuses possible.

Another sign of this same power is the reply we often received to questions about how a clerk ought to proceed if there is clearly a united meeting with the exception of one or two people who refused to stand aside for

reasons the clerk has judged insignificant. One clerk spoke for man
happens fairly often. If the time is available, hold it over. If an imme
decision is needed, then I, as clerk, would ask, 'May we record you
jection and proceed?' If the person is in his right mind, he'll say y
he is just plain unreasonable, then you make up your mind accordi
the factors in that individual case."

The writer has observed this sort of acquiescence by individu
the plea of the clerk. Although the interchange was delicately poli
seemed to boil down to a judgment by the clerk that the objector r
ought to stand aside. The objector's acquiescence seemed to involv
ceptance of the clerk's objectivity of judgment, a willingness to trus
esteemed and dispassionate observer.

Judging the Sense of the Meeting

The most important duty of the clerk is the clerk's responsibilit
judge the sense of the meeting. One aspect of that judgment, as def
by Howard Brinton, is that "In gathering the sense of the meeting the
must take into consideration that some Friends have more wisdom
experience than others and their conviction should therefore carry gre
weight."[6]

In practice, this means that a judgment must sometimes be mad
the clerk about whether the support for a proposal constitutes a valid s
of the meeting, or instead, that the weight of the meeting is divided. S
pose fifteen people have spoken in favor of a proposal and three h
spoken against it. Forty more Friends have not spoken more than an
casional "I agree" following one or other of a speaker's points. In try
to judge the sense of the meeting, the clerk is likely to consider the gen
reputation of the leading speakers for each viewpoint, the extent of in
mation and experience each brings to the topic, the apparent convict
beneath a remark, and other intangible factors.

Just as difficult, the clerk must also assess the silent forty. Whicl
them are likely to have opinions on the matter? Are any of these lik
to be opposed but silent? If so, it will probably be important to draw th
into the discussion.

Such assessments by the clerk will determine whether the clerk fe
there is a general trend in favor of the proposal or whether the discuss
should continue. If the clerk feels there is a sense of the meeting, the cl
will probably propose a minute because further discussion would a
nothing. On the other hand, the clerk may feel that the trend in fa

of the proposal may not be completely reliable, perhaps because a few Friends whose opinions have not yet been heard may sway others. In this situation, it is better to delay offering a minute until the clerk is confident that these silent individuals do not in fact wish to speak.

The opportunity to manipulate is obvious. Suppose a clerk personally favors a proposal. A favorable early trend in discussion might provide the opportunity for the clerk to announce the sense of the meeting before opposed members have had a chance to speak. Such a premature announcement may lead to manipulation, especially if individual participants do not know that others share their misgivings. Instead, they may choose not to challenge the proposed minute, judging instead that: "I must be the only one who feels this way. I guess I won't bother to speak in opposition."

Again, since it is the clerk's normal task to propose a minute which expresses the sense of the meeting, one obvious way a clerk might influence an outcome is to slant the minute towards the position the clerk personally favors. Friends have developed protection against this weakness by urging that clerks take the time to propose their precise minute immediately at the end of discussion rather than to frame the minute vaguely and then wait until after the meeting has adjourned to express the decision exactly. London Yearly Meeting's book of discipline notes that different people are present from meeting to meeting so that a second meeting is often not in a position to challenge effectively the clerk's faulty summary of the sense of the first meeting.[7]

There are, of course, ways that the clerk can be kept honest. One Friend, asked how he would react to a clerk's framing a misleading minute, volunteered that he would withdraw confidence from the clerk and propose his own minute. A clerk, interviewed just after a meeting session commented:

> There's no way to make sure the clerk does everything perfectly. The behavior of the members can readily act as control on the clerk, however. If someone of some significance mentions from the floor that he doubts the minute was correct, the clerk may have reason to take this as a warning shot across the bow! If things are wandering, someone from the floor can encourage the clerk to give direction by asking the clerk to suggest a minute. Today that happened to me. At the meeting just concluded, others' questions obliged me as clerk to offer tentative minutes.

Superficially, the clerk can be seen as a Quaker equivalent of the Speaker of the House of Commons: by the very structure of British parliamentarism, the Speaker is an impartial servant of the House. The

Speaker's responsibility to remain unbiased is enforced by the ability of the parties to expose any inappropriate actions the Speaker might take. In the Quaker case, however, the rules by which the meeting proceeds are much more informal, so that only gross violations of equity can be challenged. And the areas in which the clerk is expected to exercise judgment, especially the central responsibility of declaring the sense of the meeting, are far broader than the circumscribed powers allowed the Speaker.

Self-Restraint

The clerk, then, is entrusted with an unusual amount of authority. Although there are some checks on that authority, they are not especially forceful so long as a clerk is circumspect in his or her manipulative efforts. If the formal constraints are minimal, however, contemporary abuse of power seems curiously rare.

One cannot help being struck by the trust in the integrity of the clerk which is typical of Quaker meetings, a trust so complete that clerks speak with reverence of the duty the community asks them to perform. This simple trust came home to the writer most forcefully one evening when a woman commented as she exited the meeting room, "I really thought the sense of the meeting was something completely different until the clerk voiced it." Clearly the woman so trusted the clerk's judgment that she put aside her own evaluation without hesitation. The observer, who also had read a different sense of the meeting from that of the clerk, wondered how many others in the room had cheerfully substituted the clerk's evaluation for their own.

In a similar vein, the observer was struck by the frequent cases in which—in spite of the wise advice that the clerk should present a full minute for approval at the session—meetings would cheerfully trust the clerk to write a minute after the meeting which reflected the nuances of their agreement. Part of this was practical haste to cover the agenda by not wasting time over trifles like the proper sequence of names on a flyer. Sometimes the matter was of more consequence, as when a monthly meeting drew up guidelines for sensitively contacting lapsed members prior to dropping them from membership.[8] Especially in the more important matters, such trust indicated the meeting's confidence in the clerk.

To the observer, this attitude seems truly justified. One cannot help noticing the scrupulous efforts of a typical clerk to draw into the discussion any individuals who might help to bring clarity to an important issue.

A clerk who is unsure of the discussion's trend will ask for help from the floor. Such conduct is hardly suggestive of a desire to manipulate the deliberations.

When this reporter interviewed Friends of long experience, he found that they talked freely of situations a generation or two back when individual clerks controlled their meetings. But they contrasted such control to the present situation.

The great caution clerks feel about abuse of power came out frequently in interviews. One respected clerk mentioned that sometimes a clerk frames a "false" minute in hopes of alerting the meeting to the drift of its discussion and jolting the participants in the process. If a meeting is discussing civil rights and begins to trade stories of imprudent use of Quaker seed money by certain black entrepreneurs, the clerk might suggest, "Friends seem to feel that this fund has been ill-used and should therefore be discontinued." The impact of the tentative minute, much akin to summary statements by the therapist in nondirective counselling, may serve to force the group to face its attitudes squarely.

When asked whether this approach would be legitimate, clerks were of divided opinion. One group objected to the strategy because the clerk's position was too central to the meeting to permit proposing such a false minute. For these clerks, any such conduct was dangerous manipulation which, if recognized, ought to deprive the clerk of the respect of the group.

Another group considered the advice legitimate but dangerous: "There's a great tendency in our system to accept what the clerk offers. The suppositions all go with the clerk. The false minute approach is too subtle, [and it] may just stampede the meeting down a false road."

Both groups revealed in their reluctance an impressive sensitivity to the clerk's possible abuse of power. This sensitivity appeared again and again in their interview comments, with the most experienced clerks appearing most chary of abuse. One suspects that such is the case partly because the experienced clerk has had more opportunity to observe the ramifications of even the slightest excess in fulfilling the office and partly because longevity in clerking implies that the individual has been asked time and again to assume this office by nominating committees and constituencies that are especially attentive to the person's past record of honest impartiality.

If one adds to these factors the frequency with which clerks describe their role in explicitly religious terms—clerks seemed much more comfortable with the religious implications of Friends decision making than did

nonclerks—one rounds out the factors which are most prominent in the self-restraint clerks seem to exercise. The "faith in the presence of a Guide [and] in the deep revelatory genius of [the] meeting" which Douglas Steere outlined in the first citation in this chapter is typical of a clerk's remarks. Since the clerk is, of all the participants, the person most fully responsible for finding the unity in which the Guide is revealed, it is not surprising that the clerk's commitment to this fundamental Quaker belief tends to be a powerful protection against temptations to indulge a desire to control the outcomes.

Quaker Leadership: Ability to Read

Leadership in the Religious Society of Friends demands the intertwining of traditional basic leadership skills with a peculiar skill at reading the sense of the meeting. The basis of this conclusion, and some of its implications, are explored below.

Management Types

In his now classic analysis, Douglas M. McGregor divides conceptions of management's task into two widely accepted categories. The "theory X" manager believes that he is responsible for modifying the behavior of his naturally indolent, self-centered, gullible, and irresponsible subordinates so that their behavior fits the needs of the organization. Whether his style is harsh or gentle, his suppositions remain the same.[9]

In contrast, the "theory Y" manager believes that his subordinates are concerned about organizational needs, capable of assuming responsibility, and naturally well-motivated. The manager's task is to provide conditions that promote the use of the potential in the people of the organization. The wise manager realizes that the psychologist, Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of emergent needs must be honored: it is not enough to satisfy physiological and safety needs, for these are only prelude to the higher human needs the motivated employee will seek to fulfill through his role in the organization.[10]

On its face, the theory X approach is inconsistent with Quaker decision making because it places responsibility on the manager and Friends decisions are supposed to emerge from the group. This is not to say, however, that there are no theory X managers in the Religious Society of Friends. Admittedly, such individuals seem rare among clerks of monthly and higher level meetings. But they do tend to emerge in other roles in which their expertise makes their "recommendations" unchallengeable by the meeting. One such person made herself the unsurpassed expert

on the history of her meeting's burial ground. Another, his meeting's treasurer, made the books so complicated that only he could divine their true meaning. Occasionally, staff employees of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting have been known to adopt a similar tack in submitting proposals to supervising bodies whose judgment they did not regard highly. Such individuals attempt to parlay their exclusive expertise into control over decisions touching their specialty.

It would seem that their style imposes a fundamental limitation on these people. Although "horror stories" of previous generations suggest that such individuals did at times become clerks of meetings, the general abhorrence for such domination in the present day seems to explain why the upward mobility of the theory X manager is thwarted today.

The theory Y approach to management is more congenial to Friends practice, for it presumes that all the subordinates will be participants in the shaping of policy. Of fundamental import, however, is the reality that Quaker theory sees the clerk or other leader as servant of the meeting, not its director. The clerk does not collect ideas, then make a decision which incorporates as far as possible the group's contributions. Although things may sometimes work in just that way, the clerk's true role is to articulate the unity which he or she discovers in the community and to facilitate the formation of that unity. But the clerk is not to make the decision unilaterally.[11]

The Quaker leader, then, is not a practitioner of theory X. In the role of clerk, he or she feels comfortable with the focus on the group of theory Y, but not with its expectation that the leader is the decision maker. If we are to come to real understanding of leadership as it occurs in the Religious Society of Friends, we must move beyond these normal management categories.

Beyond Type Y: The Leader As Reader

When one questions experienced clerks and other seasoned Friends about the special qualities they would like to see in a clerk, one finds a great unity in their answers. One individual speaks of "artistry" in the "ability to sense the right timing for a given group." Others remark upon the clerk's "special gift" of sensing when the decision has been reached. This "true gift" is so reliable that "the good clerk knows whether people are saying what they really think."

It is interesting to see how often Friends resort to the language of "gift" in describing the skill of the clerk. A listener with even minimal acquaintance with traditional theological language is struck by the similarity between what Quakers report they find in their best clerks and the New Testament notion of the charisma or gratuitous gift given a believer to facilitate the public life of the Church. Among the predominant forms of charismata in the ancient Church were listed wisdom, knowledge, discernment of inner spiritual motions in oneself and in others, and gifts of government.[12] We discussed in Part One the gift of discernment which George Fox claimed. It would appear that, although modern Friends may be unaware of the theological language, their experience points them to the event that language describes. For our own purpose, in place of the theological language of charismata we will be content to refer to the phenomenon as the ability to "read" the group.

We have already given enough examples of this ability to read the unity of the group to illustrate the clerk's role. Since this ability is not automatically limited to those who are clerks, perhaps an example or two of nonclerks exercising this sort of leadership would be helpful. One clerk, when asked whether she sometimes erred in judging the sense of the meeting, replied: "Every once in a while you get called fairly on a minute. I remember once a discussion on whether to buy a bookkeeping machine. I declared that Friends didn't seem to have reached unity and therefore the decision must be delayed. Then X rose and suggested that Friends were really quite ready to buy the machine. This drew general approval. He had just read the feeling of the meeting better than I."

The decision described above fits the pattern of a number we have observed, and the dynamic is worthy of note. When the clerk announced that there had appeared to be no unity, the bulk of the participants probably accepted her reading of the situation without challenge. People who knew they themselves approved the purchase did not question the clerk's judgment that approval was not universal. Only the man with the ability to read the group well was ready to suggest that the clerk's reading had been faulty: hesitancy expressed in previous speakers' remarks was not as deep-seated as she had thought. The test of his assessment, of course, was the immediate response of the individual members of the meeting. Anyone who personally was unwilling to proceed with the purchase could have stood and said so, and in that case, the clerk's reading would have been confirmed.

Here is another example which combines ability to read a group with the respect the group accords an individual blessed with the ability of reading deeply. In November 1970, a special committee called "The 1970

Working Party" reported to Philadelphia Representative Meeting its proposals for self-examination as a tool to discovering racism within the Yearly Meeting. The Working Party asked authorization to contact all members of the Yearly Meeting and all Yearly Meeting organizations in order to ask that Friends look "to their possessions, practices, and relationships 'to try whether the seeds of exploitation and oppression lie in them"[13] Discussion was lively and much divided. Many felt comfortable with the proposal; many others saw in it a document which could alienate Friends or which falsely presumed that racism was deeply rooted with the Yearly Meeting. Some feared that such self-examination was intended as a prelude to a call for reparations to the black community. The issue so divided those present that they agreed the next month's session would convene early to allow for an hour's silent worship to let everyone think the document through deeply and, it was hoped, find unity in the shared silence of the worship. In the interim, of course, the Working Party's proposal would not be implemented.

The next month's session occurred as agreed. Silent worship was interspersed with a few deeply-felt messages from individual worshipers who spoke of their concerns on both sides of the issue. In the business session which followed, the participants were asked to try to maintain the spirit of worship as they discussed the issue. At this point, it was not at all clear that unity would likely be reached. The clerk remarked that she saw no agreement.

At this juncture, a Friend known for his ability to read the community stood to speak. He had been silent in the previous month's discussion and was not predictably of either party in the present disagreement. He remarked simply that, for the last month, he had kept the proposal of the Working Party on the nightstand next to his bed along with his volume of the traditional testimonies and concerns of the Religious Society of Friends. He had read the Working Party's document many times. He was satisfied that not one word of it was in conflict with the traditions of Friends.

The whole discussion changed. People who had been opposed spoke of how to temper any possible misunderstandings of the proposal. Attention focused on how best to present the document so that it would have fullest effect. The Working Party's proposal was approved and forwarded to the monthly meetings.[14]

Almost five years later, the writer interviewed the Friend whose remarks had been so significant in the decision. Early in the discussion,

he seemed ill at ease, even suspicious of what underlay the interviewer's interest. But when the incident in question was mentioned, his tone changed entirely to one of serious reverence. In reflecting on the event he remarked:

> Sometimes there is not the time for a large number to speak, and slowly, slowly for an acceptable solution to emerge. Or perhaps there is no desire by many to speak even though they are not satisfied with the proposal on the floor.
>
> So we need leadership. It seems contrary to Friends theory, doesn't it? Perhaps it's a weakness, given our theory, that leadership is still needed. Within our groups, certain people will be followed when they speak. Typically, there's lots of discussion until one person—often a person with skill at doing it, skill that's soon recognized by the group and expected to emerge at critical times—stands up and proposes what all can buy. The great arguer isn't this sort of person. It's not that type of leadership. Personally, I try to see both sides, make myself keep quiet until I understand the whole question. And then, sometimes, I feel moved to speak.

The case illustrates a number of factors common to this sort of situation. The group feared disunity, and was attempting to conduct itself in a prayerful, even a gathered atmosphere. The speaker himself felt moved to speak. The speaker's remarks were so deeply consistent with the atmosphere of united, reverent searching that he seemed to speak in a divinely authenticated way.[15]

Here, then, is a combination of ability to read the community's attitudes and to lead the community to a new unity. The speaker is doing two things at once. The two cannot be separated. Because he knows the extent of their unity of desire, he is able to call them to a unity of commitment to a course of action. The latter unity does not exist before he calls them. This ability to judge not only the unity that is real but also the unity that is now possible is in the deepest sense the charisma which marks Quaker leadership.

This is the quality that Friends look for when they are selecting clerks. It should be no surprise to the reader that the man who spoke up at the critical moment concerning the Working Party's proposal is the same person that suggested the clerk was in error about the business machine. A few years later he was selected to be clerk of the Yearly Meeting.

Some Weaknesses of Friends Leadership

Every machine breaks down. Every system of government has its flaws. The Quaker form of leadership provides a great support to the goal of

reaching unity on divisive questions. But that form of leadership, too, has weaknesses.

Lack of Congruence Between Gifts

The most obvious problem is that there is no guarantee that individuals with the ability to read the community accurately will also excel in the basic organizational skills required for running a meeting. Nor are all those who know how to keep a meeting moving at an effective pace capable of reading the leanings of the members. Then again, there are some Friends able to read groups but not especially patient when asked to clerk a meeting. Some monthly meetings and other Quaker groups find themselves with clerks who are selected because of their strength in one area in spite of weakness in another. Where basic organizational skills are lacking, one notes severe disorganization of meetings. Where the clerk combines excellent perception of trends with impatience, one finds meetings which feel cowed by the dominance of the clerk who announces agreement before some participants are ready to acknowledge—even to themselves—that they have in fact changed their opinion. Given this spectrum of possible combinations of strengths and weaknesses, the visitor should not be too surprised to discover quite different styles and emphases in various Quaker groups using the same fundamental procedures.

Abdication of Responsibility by "Ungifted" Quakers

We have already mentioned the woman who thought the sense of the meeting was completely different until the clerk voiced it. Friends who are timid or hesitant to take stands will sometimes sit back and leave it to the clerk and other vocal leaders to thrash out the pros and cons of an issue and reach a conclusion. The display of special gifts by these leaders seems to provide a justification for the "ungifted" to refuse to enter into the process. Although Quaker theory holds firmly that the community needs to hear that of God in every one, the presence of individuals of special skill seems to make it easier for more ordinary people to excuse themselves from participation. In conversations during coffee breaks and after meetings, this writer was often struck by the phenomenon of people who had remained silent but who now went out of their way to exclaim over how lucky the meeting was to have one of the more gifted vocal participants.

Overmuch Influence by the Readers at Critical Junctures

The sort of abuse we are about to discuss is one against which Quaker

method has little defense. We raise this point with some hesitancy. However, the abuse can be very significant. The efforts made by Quaker leaders to avoid abuse are impressive, yet their very sensitivity to the matter indicates how dangerous it can be. We refer to the ability of readers to use their special status in the community to lead the group to their personal preference under guise of identifying an as yet unrecognized area of unity.

The clerk or the nonclerk who has demonstrated the ability to read the meeting is accorded high regard because of his or her skill. Theologically, this role is heightened because Friends consider unity a sign of divine guidance. The individual who can discern the unity is thus a seer.

Such a person quickly exercises an influence that is subtle and pervasive. The supposed agreement that the reader enunciates—because the reader has enunciated it—has innate authority. Individuals in the group who had not thought of the position offered by the reader are highly receptive to it because, coming from this person, it probably is right for the group. Individuals explicitly opposed to the position tend to reconsider their position, sometimes squelching their doubts on the grounds that the gifted person probably is reading the group correctly even if their own reading of the group had been just the opposite.

Add to this the ordinary dynamic of group action that potential solutions are usually accepted more readily when the group has discussed long enough to feel frustration and to fear that no decision will be reached, and you suddenly discover that the theologically right moment to speak up is often the psychologically right moment. Thus, the person who comes to the meeting with a solution in his back pocket might wait until the group seems ripe for the idea instead of proposing it at the outset. In Quakerism, this ploy may become wrapped in the garb of inspiration as the group confuses the speaker's prepared in advance suggestion for an inspired reading of the present level of agreement of the assembly.

The writer recalls a casual conversation with a woman who sat next to him at a meeting for business. She mentioned what she thought would be the best approach to an issue dividing the community. The visitor asked whether she would suggest her solution as soon as the topic came to the floor. "No," she said, "I doubt they'd be ready for it. You have to wait for the right moment."

The topic was introduced. She waited. Discussion revealed the main pros and cons. She waited. Discussion became involved and repetitious. After about five more minutes, she stood to offer her solution. It was

received with gratitude, discussed briefly, then approved.

This apparent manipulation is not a simple matter. Perhaps the woman in question had been thinking the matter through prayerfully and had felt led the day before to offer this solution. If so, should she have offered it at a psychologically inappropriate moment? Clearly, if her message was from the Lord, she was not given it for use at any moment except the one when it would do the most good.

Or perhaps she had no particular feeling that her solution was from the Lord. She still felt it was a good solution. Why shouldn't she wait until the time when the group would be most receptive?

Certainly, had she wrapped her suggestion in the trappings of revelation by calling for her listeners to center down, and appearing to speak out of her present religious leadings, she would have been guilty of manipulation. Since she did not do that, was it her fault that some in the community might take her suggestion as a reading of the group's hidden potential for unity when she was in fact only gauging whether the group was frustrated and confused enough to be ripe for her ready-made solution? Such a person has read the group's confusion, not its unity.

We do not wish to place overmuch emphasis upon this matter. Suffice it to say that Quaker suppositions can sometimes elevate a contribution that is merely a timely offering of a preset position into a spontaneous insight by a speaker. Thus, a tactical measure can be elevated to a religious revelation, and the individual reputed to be a reader holds dangerous power to sway the community.

The writer has been sure he was dealing with such a situation only on the one occasion already cited. At many another time, however, it struck this observer that the situation was ripe for such manipulation or that there was no conceivable way to determine whether a proposal of possible unity which the community then accepted was in fact the product of insight or of prior planning. It is good that Friends noted for the ability to read are so aware of the obligation they bear to self-discipline in use of their special gift. For the community has little defense against such a gift should it be carefully misused. Only the teetotaler is a safe guard for the liquor.

Conclusion

CHAPTER VI

Reaching Decisions

THE QUAKER MOVEMENT began as a group held together by no visible bond but united by its own sense of fellowship, a kinship of spirit kept vital by concerned Friends who were continually traveling from one meeting to another. But it was soon found necessary to have some sort of organization dealing with practical matters. For example, there was immediate need of systematic help for persons suffering loss of property through distraint of goods to meet fines. Arrangements had to be made for the validity of marriages without the usual service of an officiating clergyman. The poor were cared for, burials arranged, records kept of births, marriages, sufferings and deaths. There were children to be educated and traveling Friends, if their own resources were insufficient, needed financial help. Friends often desired to petition King or Parliament. Disorderly persons were sometimes to be dealt with in order "that Truth might be cleared" of misunderstanding by the scandalized public. But the very need for organization gave rise to a serious theoretical problem—how can a free fellowship based on divine guidance from within set up any form of church government providing direction from without?

As early as 1652, William Dewsbury urged Friends to set up general meetings, to be attended by Friends in a limited area to meet immediate needs. His instructions were given forth as "the word of the living God to his Church." Other leaders spoke in

similar terms and with the same prophetic authority. But care was taken not to produce an authoritarian code. In 1656 at a meeting of Friends in Balby, Yorkshire, a letter was composed "From the Spirit of Truth to the children of light," giving advice rather than formulating rules on twenty points of behavior. This letter concluded with the well-known sentence:

> Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by; but that all, with a measure of the light, which is pure and holy, may be guided: and so in the light walking and abiding, these things may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not in the letter; for the letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life.[1]

Additional advices were issued from time to time by various meetings with a similar caution regarding the priority of the Spirit. In 1659 the General Meeting at Skipton for Friends in the North issued a document for guidance in conduct. Here again Friends are urged to stand fast in their liberty,

> that no footsteps may be left for those that shall come after, or to walk by example, but that all may be directed and left to the truth, in it to live and walk and by it to be guided, that none may look back at us, nor have an eye behind them, but that all may look forward waiting in the Spirit for the revelation of those glorious things which are to be made manifest to them.[2]

This letter epitomizes the underlying principle of Quaker church government:

> That the power of the God-head may be known in the body, in that perfect freedom which every member hath in Christ Jesus; that none may exercise lordship or dominion over another, nor the person of any be set apart, but as they continue in the power of truth that truth itself in the body may reign, not persons nor forms: and that all such may be honored as stand in the life of the truth wherein is the power not over, but in the body.[3]

In other words, the meeting is to act as a whole and be governed by Truth, not by persons appointed to rule. If individuals are chosen for some particular service to the meeting, they should be continued in such service only so long as they are guided by the Truth. Thus the basis of Quaker church government was early expressed in a way that eliminated the possibility of individual authority. Only the authority of the group acting by the dictates of Truth was valid. The supremacy of a majority over a minority was completely dispensed with. There was no voting.

General meetings drawing Friends together in limited areas at periodic intervals developed in the decade from 1650 to 1660. Some of these occasions were simply meetings for worship, others also included sessions for the transaction of corporate affairs. By 1658 general meetings were held yearly with public Friends in attendance from all over England. The support of Friends traveling in the ministry to distant places often claimed attention.

When George Fox was released from his three years' imprisonment at Lancaster and Scarborough in 1666, he found the Quakers suffering severely because of the Conventicle Act which forbade attendance at any assembly for worship other than those of the Established Church. There were also a number of other serious difficulties. Nearly all the leading Friends were in prison. Fanatics, such as the hysterical women whose adulation of James Naylor earlier led to public scandal, were bringing the movement into disrepute. The followers of John Perrot were teaching that the essence of religion required no outward frame of reference. This party held that even fixed times for public worship were man-made devices. To counteract such tendencies toward religious anarchism

a group of leading Friends issued a letter asserting the authority of a meeting to exclude from its fellowship persons who persisted in rejecting its judgment. This was shortly before George Fox's release.[4] This letter, by definitely subordinating individual guidance to the sense of the meeting as a whole, marked an important step in Quaker development.

Bruised and weakened by his experience in jail and scarcely able to mount his horse, Fox at this critical juncture went about England and Ireland for four years bringing order out of confusion by setting up Monthly Meetings as executive units of the Society of Friends. His visit to America in 1671-73 was largely for the same purpose. While there had been some Monthly Meetings before this time, they now became standard procedure and have continued to be basic throughout Quaker history.

A Monthly Meeting is made up of all the Friends in a given district. It sometimes includes more than one meeting for worship. The constituent parts of a Monthly Meeting came to be called Preparative Meetings, their function being to prepare for the Monthly Meeting which made the important decisions. Combinations of neighboring Monthly Meetings are organized into Quarterly Meetings and the Quarterly Meetings in turn are united in a Yearly Meeting. This system developed gradually. At first the Yearly Meeting in London consisted exclusively of Friends engaged in the ministry. By 1672, and regularly after 1678, it included representatives sent from all the Quarterly Meetings in England. By 1760, the Yearly Meeting was open to all Friends. The evolution of this system in America followed similar lines, except that, owing to the geographical situation, six Yearly Meetings emerged in the colonies.

The first Quaker meetings for business (or church government) were made up of men only, but by 1656 women's meetings began to appear. In 1671 Fox wrote a circular letter urging that they be set up everywhere. Eventually there were Monthly, Quarterly and

Yearly Meetings for women. For some years the business before the women's meetings differed from the business before the men's meetings though there was no sense of inferiority. It consisted of matters which were felt to be of peculiar interest to women, such as care of the poor, the sick and the imprisoned. The important Six Weeks Meeting, begun in 1671, which supervised the affairs of London Quakers was a joint body of men and women. Today all Quaker business meetings except in two or three conservative areas in America are made up of men and women. The assignment of important executive responsibilities to women was a bold step in the seventeenth century. The training which Quaker women received in these meetings as well as in meetings for worship qualified them to become leaders of their sex.

The system of Monthly, Quarterly and Yearly Meetings as it finally developed in England and America suggests the organic principle of the affiliation of cells or small units in a large organism. The Monthly Meeting is the primary cell in the Society of Friends. Only there does membership exist. Individual Friends have the same responsibilities in the larger group as in the smaller. There is no delegated authority. As Fox writes in a long epistle on church government, "The least member in the Church hath an office and is serviceable and every member hath need one of another" (Ep. 264, 1669).

The larger group does not exist to exert authority over its smaller parts, nor do the smaller parts dominate the larger. Each is both means and end. The larger exists to widen the range of acquaintance and judgment and to carry out undertakings too big for the smaller group. The larger group asks its constituent parts to contribute money to support its enterprises; gives credentials and financial aid when necessary to ministers and others traveling long distances; supports the larger schools; appoints committees to deal with a variety of issues and concerns beyond the range of the smaller meetings, such as peace, temperance, race relations, publications,

the social order, national legislation and the relief of suffering at home and abroad.

A concern, that is, a strong inward sense that some action should be taken to meet a certain situation, may arise in the mind of any individual. It often develops in the silence in a meeting for worship. The member brings it before the Monthly Meeting which may or may not sympathize with it. If circumstances require a wider concurrence, the Monthly Meeting may forward the matter to the Quarterly Meeting. The Quarterly Meeting may then act upon it or may send it on to the Yearly Meeting. In this way a concern secures the support of a group large enough and wise enough to carry it out. The power of the individual to accomplish what he feels has been laid upon him is many times multiplied if his concern is taken up by all three, the Monthly Meeting, the Quarterly Meeting and, finally, the Yearly Meeting. In some instances an individual may first present his concern to a Quarterly or Yearly Meeting or to a specialized committee. In this case the reverse process may occur, the concern being referred to the Monthly Meeting for action.

The Yearly Meeting issues advices for the guidance of Monthly and Quarterly Meetings and of individual members. It also addresses Queries to constituent meetings in order to ascertain their condition and discover if help is needed. Advices and Queries are not orders issued by a superior to an inferior. The Monthly Meetings are the real executive units of the Society.

Early in the eighteenth century selections from the minutes of the Yearly Meetings were gathered in book form under captions alphabetically listed. This compilation came to be called the *Book of Discipline*. The manuscript book issued in 1762 by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting is entitled *A Collection of Christian and Brotherly Advices Given Forth from Time to Time by the Yearly Meetings of Friends for New Jersey and Pennsylvania*. As need arose additions were inserted, each with its appropriate date. This book, abbreviated to contain only

active regulations, was printed in 1797. Later the alphabetical system was replaced by a topical arrangement. The *Discipline* has been reissued and revised from time to time up to the present. It is both a moral guide and a manual of church government. Additions and revisions show the evolution of moral consciousness as it became increasingly sensitive to slavery, war, intemperance, racial and class discrimination and other evils.

As an example of this growth of moral sensitivity, we find under the heading "Negroes or Slaves" twenty-four manuscript pages of entries, dated 1688 to 1790, recording each step of the process by which the Society of Friends in America freed itself from holding slaves.* Under "Queries" there are three sets of questions dated 1743, 1755, 1765 respectively. Those dealing with slavery are:

> 1743. Do Friends observe the former advice of our Yearly Meeting not to encourage the importation of Negroes, nor to buy them after imported?
>
> 1755. Are Friends clear of importing or buying Negroes and do they use those well which they are possessed of by inheritance or otherwise, endeavoring to train them up in the principles of the Christian Religion?
>
> 1765. The same query as in 1755.

*1696 advice against the importation of Negroes; 1730 advice against buying imported Negroes; 1754 advice against buying any Negroes; 1758 appointment of a committee of five to visit all Friends who hold slaves and persuade them to set their slaves at liberty; 1762 substantial success is reported and the committee asks to be released. Quarterly and Monthly Meetings are instructed to deal with Friends who still hold slaves; 1778 the Yearly Meeting declares that Quaker slaveholders who "continue to reject the advice of their brethren" should be disowned by their meetings.

In 1776 the Query was amended as follows:

> Are Friends clear of importing, purchasing, disposing of or holding mankind as slaves? And do they use those well who are set free and are necessarily under their care and not in circumstances through nonage or incapacity to minister to their own necessities? And are they careful to educate and encourage them in a religious and virtuous life?

Here are three steps showing increasing sensitiveness to a clearly defined evil. First, Friends were not to buy imported Negroes; next, they were not to buy any, though it was assumed that they might inherit them; finally, they were not to hold them in servitude at all. The evolution of the *Book of Discipline* is a testimony to the power of the Quaker method in educating and sensitizing conscience.

In the same year that the Declaration of Independence stated "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness," the Quakers made their own declaration which took these great words at their full value. They did not support their own revolution by violence, but nonetheless they carried it through in a thoroughgoing way.

The perennial problem of the relative rights and responsibilities of the individual and the group was never so clearly solved that it did not give rise to difficulties. The Wilkinson-Story party separated from the main body in England in 1678, principally because it was opposed to any authority exercised by the group over the individual. The separation in Philadelphia which took place in 1827 was to a large extent the outcome of differences between the more individualistic and the more authoritarian trends in the Society of Friends.

Yet in a large measure the Quaker form of church government succeeded in securing a reasonable balance between freedom and

order. Without some authority over the individual the movement would certainly have disintegrated as did the various groups of religious anarchists. Without considerable liberty the Society of Friends would have crystallized into a formal system. The adjustment depended upon group authority over the individual tempered by individual initiative in affecting the judgment of the group.

Among Friends the meeting for the transaction of church business is as distinctly a religious exercise as is the meeting for worship, but it has a different objective. The meeting for worship is focused upon the divine-human relationship and the meeting for business is mainly concerned with interhuman co-operation, the two being interdependent. From another point of view, the meeting for worship concerns *being* while the meeting for business concerns *doing*. What is implicit in worship becomes explicit in action. The meeting for business should, therefore, be preceded by a period of worship in which the hard shell of egocentricity is dissolved and the group united into a living whole. It is also well to conclude the business meeting with a period of silent devotion. George Fox writes to Friends:

> Friends, keep your meetings in the power of God, and in his wisdom (by which all things were made) and in the love of God, that by that ye may order all to his glory. And when Friends have finished their business, sit down and continue awhile quietly and wait upon the Lord to feel him. And go not beyond the Power, but keep in the Power by which God Almighty may be felt among you. [Ep. 162, 1658]

Since there is but one Light and one Truth, if the Light of Truth be faithfully followed, unity will result. "The Light itself," says Thomas Story, "is not divided, but one and the same entire, undivided Being continually."[5] The nearer the members of a group

come to this one Light, the nearer they will be to one another, just as the spokes of a wheel approach one another as they near the center. The spirit of worship is essential to that type of business meeting in which the group endeavors to act as a unit. True worship overcomes excessive individuality by producing a superindividual consciousness. If serious differences of opinion appear, it may come about that by recourse to a period of silence a basis for unity can be discovered. If a high degree of unity is not reached, action is postponed, provided an immediate decision is not necessary. For such a meeting the only essential official is a clerk whose business it is to ascertain and record or be responsible for recording the sense of the meeting.

The business before the meeting, presented by the clerk, a committee or an individual, is "spoken to" by those who have opinions or judgment regarding it. When the consideration reaches a stage which indicates that a reasonable degree of unity has been attained, the clerk announces what he believes to be the sense of the meeting. If the meeting agrees with his wording as given or revised, this becomes the judgment of the meeting and is so preserved in the minutes. The degree of unity necessary for a decision depends on the importance of the question and the character and depth of feeling of those who oppose the general trend of opinion. On many items of routine business little or no expression is necessary. Even silence may give consent. But on important matters care is taken to secure the vocal participation of all who feel able and willing to express themselves. Some problems have been postponed for more than a century awaiting unity. An example was the toleration of slavery within the Society of Friends. Had a vote been taken as early as 1700 slavery would probably have been voted out, but a substantial minority would not have concurred. The subject was brought up again and again, progress was made slowly until in 1776 the Society was united in refusing membership to persons who held slaves.

An opposing minority, however small, is not disregarded, especially if it contains members whose judgment is highly respected. The *weight* of a member in determining the decision of the meeting depends on the confidence which the meeting has in the validity of his judgment. On certain subjects some Friends are more reliable than others. On a financial problem the opinion of a single financier might determine the sense of the meeting, although his opinion might carry less weight on some other subjects. If an individual lays a concern before the meeting, much depends on the degree to which the concern has gripped him. If he feels it deeply and perhaps brings it up again and again in spite of opposition, the meeting may finally acquiesce even though some hesitation is still felt by some.

If a serious difference of opinion exists on a subject which cannot be postponed, decision may be left to a small committee. Not infrequently the minority withdraw their opposition in order that the meeting may come to a decision. It is, however, surprising how often real unity is reached, even though the discussion in its initial stages shows a wide variety of opinions, or a pronounced cleavage arising from strongly held convictions. As the consideration proceeds, unity gradually emerges and is finally reached. The decision may be along lines not even thought of at the beginning. This procedure takes more time and patience than the voting method, but the results are generally more satisfactory to all concerned.

The clerk is theoretically a recording officer, but in practice he must frequently assume the duties of a presiding officer. He must be sensitive to all trends of opinion, including those not well expressed. When two or more persons rise at once, he must recognize one as having the floor. He must determine the appropriate amount of time to be devoted to each item on the agenda in view of the total business before the meeting. He must decide on how much expression he can safely base his minute. He is responsible

for keeping one subject at a time before the meeting. He may request talkative members to limit their remarks and silent members to express themselves. All this appears to lay a heavy burden upon the clerk, hut in any contingency he may derive help from any member. Theoretically, it is the meeting as a whole, rather than the clerk, that exercises authority, but the clerk may occasionally find himself in a position in which some exercise of authority is unavoidable.

If this Quaker method of arriving at unity does not succeed, the difficulty is generally due to some members who have not achieved the right attitude of mind and heart. Dogmatic persons who speak with an air of finality, or assume the tone of a debater determined to win, may be a serious hindrance. Eloquence which appeals to emotion is out of place. Those who come to the meeting not so much to discover Truth as to win acceptance of their opinions may find that their views carry little weight. Opinions should always be expressed humbly and tentatively in the realization that no one person sees the whole truth and that the whole meeting can see more of Truth than can any part of it. When B speaks following A, he takes into consideration A's opinion. C follows with a statement which would probably have been different had A and B not spoken. Every speaker credits every other sincere speaker with at least some insight. Finally, a statement is made which receives the approval of all. A number of persons say "I approve," "I agree" or some equivalent.

This method is similar to some other consensus methods; for instance, those suggested by M. P. Follett in *The New State* or Frank Walser in *The Art of Conference.* It differs radically in being religious. George Fox Writes, "Friends are not to meet like a company of people about town or parish business, neither in their men's or women's meetings, but to wait upon the Lord" (Ep. 313, 1674). Quakers have used this method with a large degree of success for three centuries because it has met the religious test, being based

on the Light Within producing unity. As the Light is God in His capacity as Creator, Unity in Him creates Unity in the group. When the method has not succeeded, as in the divisions during the nineteenth century, spiritual life was low and Friends too impatient to wait for unity to develop.

At its best, the Quaker method does not result in a compromise. A compromise is not likely to satisfy anyone completely. The objective of the Quaker method is to discover Truth which will satisfy everyone more fully than did any position previously held. Each and all can then say, "That is what I really wanted, but I did not realize it." To discover what we really want as compared to what at first we think we want, we must go below the surface of self-centered desires to the deeper level where the real Self resides. The deepest Self of all is that Self which we share with all others. This is the one Vine of which we all are branches, the Life of God on which our own individual lives are based. To will what God wills is, therefore, to will what we ourselves really want.

The voting method is a mechanical process whereby the larger force is pitted against the smaller one over which it prevails, possibly without even an attempt to adjust to it. The Quaker method produces synthesis in which each part makes some adjustment to the whole. In general, voting creates nothing new, one party is simply more numerous than the other. The organic method may actually produce by a process of cross-fertilization something which was not there at the beginning. As in all life, the whole is more than the sum of its parts. A new creation emerges through the life or soul of the whole which was not completely present in any of the parts. As the meeting becomes a unit, it learns to think as a unit. This is an achievement. Every partial, fragmentary view contributes to the total view.

The voting method is usually quicker. Organic growth is a slow process, but that which has life is adaptable, while mechanisms tend to be rigid. In the voting method when the vote is taken,

each individual has one or a fixed number of votes, irrespective of his interest or knowledge, while in the Quaker method, each individual possesses or should possess weight proportional to his interest and his knowledge of the particular subject before the meeting.

It might appear that, because the Quaker meeting must wait for unity, this method would tend toward conservatism. This is sometimes the case, but, in general, Quaker pioneering in social reforms shows that conservatism has not generally prevailed. The first response of many people to a new proposition is negative; hence the voting method which is the quickest may itself produce a negative response. Minorities tend to be more radical than majorities. If decision is postponed in the effort to secure unity, time is given for an advanced minority to convince the majority. In the end a more novel decision may result.

A minor consideration is that of size. The Quaker method works better in small than in large groups. This is true both of the meeting for worship and of the meeting for business. It is easier to achieve unity in an intimate group the members of which are well acquainted with one another than in a large group where there is bound to be more diversity. But experience shows that even in large groups, especially if they contain some able, "well seasoned Friends," this method can be employed successfully. Biologists believe that evolution can take place best in groups of a moderate size. If the group is too small, there are not enough variations to insure progress. If the group is too large, variations are swamped by the impact of the mass.

Therefore, if a Monthly Meeting becomes overgrown, it should divide. Such cell-division is the organic method of growth which has been characteristic in the Society of Friends from the beginning. Division may also be occasioned by the scattering due to economic reasons. Members, especially young people, may move to localities where there is no Friends meeting. Perhaps they will

start meetings in their homes. Such a meeting may begin in a very small way, but as like-minded persons find out about it and isolated Friends realize that such a project has been undertaken, the meeting will probably grow. This simple method of growth gives Friends a strategic advantage. Religious sects which require professional pastors and special apparatus cannot afford to begin so informally. But Friends can start a meeting anywhere and under the simplest conditions with as few as two members. In colonial days, Friends spread rapidly in many pioneer communities because a Friends meeting could so readily be held in a home.

The Quaker method is likely to be successful in proportion as the members are acquainted with one another; better still if real affection exists among them. When differences and factions arose in the Corinthian Church its members wrote to ask Paul's advice. After making several concrete suggestions, he goes on to say in the famous 18th Chapter of his letter that love is really the only solution. In a similar situation John speaks in his first letter of love as essential. "We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren" (I John 3:14).

For "love" Paul and John use the Greek word *agape* instead of the more usual Greek word *eros*. *Agape* means unselfish love which seeks to be possessed rather than to possess. Paul said, "*agape* does not insist on its own way" (I Cor. 13:5). This is the highest binding force within a religious group. It signifies the Spirit which draws men together and to God without at the same time resulting in the domination of one will by another. It is love that brings into harmony the apparently contradictory concepts of unity and freedom.

Agape is closely akin to friendship, a uniting force which at the same time respects individuality and freedom. In the Gospel of John Christ identifies love of this type with friendship when he says, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Since the word "love" has so many

different meanings, it was more appropriate that the Quakers should call themselves a Society of Friends than, as one contemporary group did, a Family of Love. It may be that the appellation "Friends," which has become so familiar that its origin is seldom inquired into, came from the saying of Jesus, "No longer do I call you servants, for the servaut does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends" (John 15:13). In the early minutes of the meetings in Pennsylvania the Quakers call themselves "The Friends of God."

The Society of Friends in choosing their name gave expression to the feeling that their religion was based on friendship in distinction from a code of duty appropriate to servants whose obligation is to yield obedience. Here the early Friends made a religious emphasis different from the Protestants of their time. The Puritans held that man's hope of salvation depended on obedience to commands set down for all time in the sacred book. These commands were thought of as instructions which a servant receives "who knows not what his lord does" and must needs obey, whether he understands or not. But if God's will is revealed not so much by a law from without as by the Light of Truth which produces action inspired from within, the relation is one of friendship and freedom based on understanding. There is no external domination. Hence arises the difference between the Puritan concept of duty with its inner tension and compulsion and the Quaker concept of conscience with its sense of freedom and peace. A servant may serve because of a sense of duty, but a friend helps his friend for a reason other than duty.. Those who render God service from a sense of duty may hear the divine voice saying, "So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty'" (Luke 17:10).

In addition to the religion of friendship and the religion of obedience, there is another type of religion which extols the kind of love which unifies through possession. Such love is described

by many of the great Christian mystics. It is the Spiritual Marriage, the very top of the mystical ladder, the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs. In emotional content it is akin to the marriage of husband and wife. Unity with God results in so complete a submergence of the individual that individuality is lost, just as a drop of water falls into the ocean and is lost. In emphasizing this experience, many devotional writings of the saints strike a note foreign alike to Quaker and Protestant. Unity through obedience, unity through emotion and unity through friendship, all are deep aspects of human experience. The Quaker emphasis allows greater significance to individuality and freedom.

The Society of Friends endeavors to maintain an organization which does not destroy freedom. Freedom appears in an act of concurrence performed not from any sense of inner or outer compulsion but in following Truth for the love of it. The Light Within being both Truth and Love, draws people together from within. It exerts no outside pressure. It respects the unique personality of each individual. The Ranters, Antinomians and others with anarchistic leanings, some of whom early left the Society of Friends because they felt that any form of organization would limit their freedom to follow the Light of Truth wherever it might lead, did not realize that the Light was Love as well as Truth. To love the truth is to follow that which draws humanity together into a unity of friendship or nonpossessive love, the highest condition in the universe, the very Presence of God Himself. William Penn wrote in his *Maxims*, "Nor can spirits ever be divided that love and live in the same Divine Principle, the Root and Record of their Friendship."

This problem of freedom within an organized group was faced by the early Christians. After Paul had founded the Galatian Church, certain persons came there who told the Galatian Christians that in order to be Christians they must carry out in full the law of Moses. When Paul heard of this he wrote with more fervor

than in any of his other letters that have come down to us, showing that Christianity is not the old law, neither is it a new law. It is freedom from law. At first this may appear to be pure anarchy. But Paul was not speaking of unlimited liberty for self-indulgence (Gal. 5:18). With the external restraint of law, he contrasts internal guidance based on the love of God. This is pure freedom because, through union with God, man wills what God wills and God is free. Man, therefore, may share in God's freedom. Paul speaks in terms of the Christ Within. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). This is true also of the Galatian converts, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal 3:27). And so he exclaims with joy and wonder, "Christ has set us free; stand fast, therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery."The law is for children and slaves but "because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (Gal 4:6).

This is not an easy doctrine. It is not surprising that the Christian Church has been slow to understand Paul or has not striven to understand him. The Church was eventually presided over by an ecclesiastical hierarchy which left little opportunity for liberty of the Spirit. Paul admits the need of regulations to govern the immature who have not yet won their freedom in Christ (Gal. 4:1-3). But the Church eventually allowed little freedom except at the top. Early Protestantism with its doctrine of depravity required an external rule and the power of external grace in place of an internal governing Spirit. The Scripture furnished a code interpreted by creeds that was as binding as the law of Moses. The Quakers stand alone in having attempted a form of church government which, however it may have developed in practice, allowed in theory for the liberty of those who are led by the Spirit. Like Paul they recognized the need of precepts for the spiritually immature such as children in school, but even the Quaker schools were so devised that compulsion was minimized.

The attainment of unity within the meeting is not the same as the attainment of uniformity. Unity is spiritual, uniformity mechanical. Friends have never required of their members assent to a religious or social creed, though not infrequently a body of Friends has issued a statement expressing their religious or social views at a particular time. There is, however, always the reservation that the Spirit of Truth may lead to further insight. Differences within the group on the particular application of general principles are tolerated, provided they are being actively explored in a spirit of friendship and in a continued search for truth. Such differences are often of great value in helping new aspects of truth to emerge.

The discovery of truth through differences of opinion is well illustrated in the history of science. "A clash of doctrines is not a disaster—it is an opportunity," says Whitehead.[6] As an illustration he shows how disagreement in the results of experiments on the atomic weight of some elements led to the discovery that the same element may assume two or more distinct forms or isotopes. Of two different opinions we can say as Christ said in the parable, "Let both grow together until the harvest." The harvest is the fuller discovery of truth which includes both. Thus, as Whitehead shows, Galileo said that the earth moves and the sun is fixed. The Inquisition maintained that the earth is fixed and the sun moves. The modern theory of relativity includes both of these earlier theories. For this harvest it is sometimes necessary to wait a long time.

But differences cease to have value when fundamental principles are ignored. In science a difference between one theory which is based on the scientific method and another theory based on a different method such as magic or astrology would not be productive of new scientific truth. In similar fashion a difference between two points of view, one arrived at by free search and another arrived at by blind agreement with an authoritarian pronouncement, would not be productive of new truth. To be creative the authori-

tative edict must be subjected to a discriminating inquiry which might alter it. If viewed as fixed it is dead and unproductive.

In Quakerism as in science the new can only arise out of the old. In science a creativity which did not take past discoveries into consideration would generally be unproductive of new truth. Similarly, the Quaker method will not progress without acknowledgment of all the great truths which have been discovered in the past. The meeting should hesitate to accept any suggestion which runs counter to the accumulated wisdom of the saints and prophets who have gone before. When it seeks to arrive at a decision which is an expression of truth, it must consider as part of itself the invisible company of all those who discovered truth. Their insight must be given due weight in arriving at a decision. In religion as in science we do not start from nothing. The doctrine of the Light Within does not mean that an individual must depend only on his own measure of Light. As in science we do not expect everyone to be a Newton or a Darwin, so in religion we do not expect everyone to be a Paul or a Fox. The religious genius, like the scientific genius, must be allowed to give to those who are not geniuses the full measure of guidance.

It must be borne in mind that a synthesis of opinion achieved within a group is not good simply because it is a synthesis. Unity may occur on a high level or a low level. A group of bandits may achieve consensus in carrying out their schemes. A nation may be at one in deciding to wage aggressive war. A mob may achieve a united opinion at a lower level than the code of conduct of the individuals who compose it. The clue to this problem is the concept of the Light as that which leads *up* to God. If the proper method is followed, the Light which unifies the group will be found to be an elevating Principle. As Truth is sought through prayer, worship and an earnest effort to purge all that is self-centered and concerned with possessive desires, the group will rise through deliberation to a higher level than that on which it started. This

occurs when there is real interdependence between the meeting for worship and the meeting for business. "Agreeing Upward" is a chapter heading in the works of the Chinese philosopher, Motze. It is toward this agreeing upward that a meeting should aspire.

The organic method of arriving at decisions by consensus appears at the primitive preindividual level as well as at the advanced postindividual level. In the first case self-centeredness has not yet developed; in the second case it has been overcome. Of the Solomon Islanders, W. H. R. Rivers writes that "in the councils of such peoples there is no voting or other means of taking the opinion of the body."[7] Quakers traveling in America in colonial times sometimes visited the Indian councils and remarked that their method of coming to decisions was like that of a Quaker business meeting. John Richardson while visiting William Penn observed that the Indians "did not speak two at a time nor interfere in the least with one another." He says, "My spirit was very easy with them," and continues, "I did not feel that power of darkness to oppress me as I had done in many places among the people called Christians."[8] It was also observed that in these councils the women participated as well as the men. Thomas Chalkley writes that in traveling beyond the Susquehanna in 1706 he asked permission of the Indians to hold a religious meeting,

> upon which they called a council in which they were very grave and spoke one after another without any heat or jarring and some of the most esteemed of their women do sometimes speak in their councils.
>
> . . . Our interpreter told me that they had not done anything for many years without the counsel of an ancient, grave woman, who, I observed, spoke much in their council.[9]

Of a similar council Catherine Phillips notes:

> Several of their women sat in this conference who for fixed solidity appeared to me like Roman matrons.[10]

Such councils where sex equality is maintained and voting unknown indicate that the organic method is in accord with human nature as it evolved out of primitive, matriarchal conditions. The more mechanical method of voting becomes natural in a later stage of development when society has become more individualistic. But there is a still further stage when self-conscious individualization is surpassed but not eliminated, in a divine-human community so inspired by the one Spirit that it can act as a unit. The third stage resembles the first but it is higher because those who are in it have passed through the intermediary condition and become individuals. In the first stage there is unity; in the second, individuality; in the third, the synthesis of unity and individuality which makes possible participation in group life with freedom.

Notes

1. *Letters Etc. of Early Friends,* edited by Abram Rawlinson Barclay, 1841, p. 282.
2. *Letters,* p. 288.
3. *Letters,* p. 289.
4. *Letters,* p. 319.
5. Thomas Story, *Sermons,* 1785, p. 61.
6. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World,* 1925, p. 266.
7. William Halse, Rivers, *Instinct and the Unconscious,* 1924, p. 95.
8. John Richardson, *Journal,* 1856, p. 135.
9. Thomas Chalkley, *Journal,* 1754, p. 49.
10. Catherine Phillips, *Journal,* 1798, p. 144.